CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND THIRTIETH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 29 July 1999, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Guillermo Enrique González (Argentina)

GE.99-65275 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I declare open the 830th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament and the third part of the meetings for 1999.

All members of the Conference on Disarmament were deeply saddened to learn of the death of His Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco last Friday. During his reign of almost four decades, King Hassan II guided his country towards stability and prosperity. His legacy will be that of a leader who brought his people into the modern age while at the same time upholding the traditional values of Islam as only great statesmen can. King Hassan II combined vision with pragmatism to establish a bridge of understanding and cooperation in the Middle East and between the Arab world, Europe and the rest of the world. I should like to ask Ambassador Benjelloun-Touimi of Morocco to convey to the family of King Hassan II and the Government and people of Morocco the sincere condolences of the members of the Conference on Disarmament.

I now invite the Conference on Disarmament to observe a minute of silence in homage to His Majesty the late King Hassan II of Morocco.

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The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I now call on the coordinator of the Group of 21, Ambassador Savitri Kunadi of India.

Ms. KUNADI (India): I take the floor on behalf of the members of the Group of 21 to express our deep shock and grief at the sudden passing away of His Majesty King Hassan II of the Kingdom of Morocco.

His Majesty's far-sighted leadership for the progress and prosperity of his country won him the admiration of people the world over. He played a catalytic role in ushering in regional and international peace. The world has lost a great statesman with the demise of His Majesty King Hassan II.

On behalf of the Group of 21, I would like to convey through the delegation of Morocco our deep condolences to the Government and people of Morocco on this sad occasion.

Mr. SEIBERT (Germany): I take the floor on behalf of the delegation of the Western Group and should like to express our profound sympathy to the Government and the people of Morocco on the passing away of His Majesty King Hassan II. Throughout nearly four decades of his reign, King Hassan II acquired a high reputation as a man of peace and vision who made both a lasting contribution to his own nation and to international peace efforts. I would be grateful to Ambassador Benjelloun-Touimi for conveying our sincere condolences to his authorities.

Mr. MIKHNEVICH (Belarus) (translated from Russian): On behalf of the Eastern European Group I would like to express sincere condolences to the delegation of Morocco in the Conference on Disarmament, specifically to Ambassador Nacer Benjelloun-Touimi and through him to the Moroccan people as a

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whole on the death of King Hassan II of Morocco. I am sure that the name of King Hassan II and the deeds which glorified his country will remain for ever in the history and the memory of the peoples of Morocco and other countries. I trust that the people of Morocco will endure with fortitude the ordeal that has befallen them and fittingly pursue all the efforts embarked on by King Hassan II towards the goals of prosperity and peace.

Mr. WANG (China) (translated from Chinese): On 23 July King Hassan II, who was respected by the entire world, passed away due to illness. King Hassan was a great pioneer for the national independence and liberation of Morocco, a leader loved by the Moroccan people, and had an important influence in the world. During his lifetime King Hassan paid great attention to developing friendly relations and cooperation with China and maintained profound friendship with several generations of Chinese leaders. His death was a great loss for the Moroccan people and also deprived the Chinese people of a respected friend. The Chinese delegation would like to express our deep condolences to the Moroccan delegation and to the people of Morocco.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of China. Does any other delegation wish to speak in this connection? I call on Ambassador Nacer Benjelloun-Touimi of Morocco.

Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco) (translated from Arabic): The Moroccan delegation was greatly moved by your kind address, Mr. President, on behalf of this body and thanks you for offering your condolences to the Moroccan delegation and all Moroccans at this difficult time following the death of King Hassan II. We were similarly moved by the words of condolence offered by the representatives of the different groups of this Conference in sharing our deep sadness. In sharing the sadness of the people of Morocco following the loss of the King, you have all spoken in memory of his tremendous abilities and moral qualities and of the great pioneering role which he played throughout his life and during his leadership with his fellow heads of State in the quest for international peace and security. My delegation would like to thank you all very much and express our gratitude and appreciation for the noble position which you have all adopted, and for the minute of silence which you set aside in memory of our late King.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Morocco for his words. I should like to welcome the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, His Excellency Mr. Olexandre Chalyi, who will be the first speaker this morning. I also have on my list of speakers the representatives of Brazil, South Africa and Finland. I invite the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, His Excellency Mr. Olexandre Chalyi, to take the floor.

Mr. CHALYI (Ukraine): Mr. President, at the outset, let me congratulate you warmly on your assumption of the important and distinguished duties of CD President. All the more so, I am delighted to see in the Presidential Chair the representative of Argentina, the country with a renowned record of nuclear non-proliferation. On behalf of the Ukrainian delegation, I pledge our full support and cooperation in your activity to steer the work of the

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Conference out of its continued impasse. I also avail myself of this opportunity to express words of appreciation to your predecessors, Ambassador Robert Grey Jr. of the United States of America, Ambassador Victor Rodríguez Cedeño of Venezuela, Ambassador Nguyen Quy Binh of Viet Nam and Ambassador Mohamed-Salah Dembri of Algeria, who spared no effort to establish the basis for the substantive work of the CD this year.

My profound respect goes as well to the CD Secretary-General, Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky, his deputy, Mr. Abdelkader Bensmail, and the CD secretariat. Finally, I would like to welcome the Ambassadors, heads of delegation, who have recently joined this unique arms control and disarmament negotiation body.

Although this is the first time I have the privilege to deliver a statement at a CD plenary meeting, my knowledge of the CD's record of recent accomplishments prompts me to remind you that almost one year ago the Conference adopted an important decision to negotiate a fissile material treaty in the framework of an ad hoc committee under agenda item 1. We are very pleased and proud that this decision was adopted by the Conference under the presidency of our country, and Ambassador Mykola Maimeskul deserves gratitude for and recognition of his work done well in the Presidential Chair. After the adoption of the United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for the CD to re-establish in 1999 this ad hoc committee, the prospects for resuming negotiations this year seemed promising and bright. Nevertheless, at the end of the summer period of 1999 the Conference on Disarmament had still not adopted a set of decisions on how to deal with its various agenda items. Regrettably, none of the four drafts of the so-called comprehensive programme of work has succeeded in commanding consensus at the Conference. Several times it has been proposed to start substantive work on one or a few particular issues where consensus has already been established, but the Conference as a whole has not been attracted to such an intermediate, partial approach. Therefore, the members of the Conference should continue their efforts to find a compromise on two controversial issues: the mandates of the CD mechanisms to deal with the general aspects of nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space. The package of two proposals concerning these issues elaborated during the Algerian presidency provides an appropriate basis for seeking a solution. So we call on all parties who are particularly sensitive to the formats and modalities of dealing with ND and PAROS to do their best and modify, if necessary, their respective positions with regard to the issues concerned. The continuation of the deadlock in the CD is intolerable and I dare say that the delegations which have realistic, moderate, middle-ground-oriented positions on both issues are losing interest in further brokerage between parties who maintain rigid stances.

Despite the continuous uncertainty at the Conference, I would not like to be too pessimistic and would recall that the CD has demonstrated to the international community valid proof of its credibility in the past. By saying this I am referring, of course, to the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty.

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As far as the CWC is concerned, it is well known that Ukraine has signed and subsequently ratified this milestone treaty which should now be implemented by the international community. It goes without saying that the Chemical Weapons Convention's successful implementation depends on national implementation measures by each and every State party to the Convention.

In this connection, I would like to dwell on the national implementation of the Convention in our country. The relevant decisions made by the President and the Government of Ukraine have created the necessary basis for complete and responsible compliance with international obligations under the CWC. Shortly after the CWC's entry into force for Ukraine, a 10-year programme for the implementation of the CWC was adopted by the President of our country. This programme creates the necessary preconditions for wide-scale and long-term work for the more than 20 Ukrainian ministries and governmental bodies involved. For the time being, the National Authority of Ukraine continues to work on extension of the penal legislation of Ukraine to any activity prohibited under the Convention.

It is with great pleasure that I would like to inform you of another very important event that is going to take place in Ukraine at the beginning of August. With OPCW secretariat assistance, the National Authority of Ukraine will hold a national training course for representatives of the chemical industry.

Since May, Ukraine has been a member of the Executive Council of OPCW. Undoubtedly, our country will contribute to strengthening the Executive Council's role in promoting the effective implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and compliance with it. We do believe that a strong and effective Executive Council is essential for the achievement of the objectives of the Convention.

Another fundamental international legal instrument elaborated by the CD is the CTBT, a treaty which was a long-sought objective of the international community and which is supposed to block any further qualitative development of nuclear weapons.

Given Ukraine's well-known contribution to the process of nuclear disarmament it is needless to repeat that we have no intention of developing and testing nuclear weapons.

Ukraine therefore considers the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) as an important part of the international legal base which is to contribute to the progress of a real nuclear disarmament process. It is logical that we are interested in the earliest entry into force of the Treaty and are prepared to do everything possible in order to achieve the ratification of the Treaty by the Ukrainian Parliament before the first Conference of the member States of the CTBT. Nowadays, the documents that are necessary for ratification are in the Ukrainian Parliament's Committees and in the near future will be passed to it for its consideration. At the same time, I would underscore that in the Ukrainian population there is a growing feeling, shared by a wide range of political forces, that particular

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responsibility for the future of the CTBT lies with the nuclear-weapon States. Furthermore, in the light of some recently adopted resolutions by the Verkhovna Rada, the Ukrainian Parliament, the issue of CTBT ratification by Ukraine will acquire a significant internal policy dimension.

In this respect, Ukraine calls on those nuclear-weapon States which have not yet ratified it to do so without further delay, on the understanding that prospects for nuclear disarmament largely depend on their political will. The ratification of the CTBT by all five nuclear-weapon States being critical for its entry into force, however, should not overshadow the urgency of the signing of this international instrument by all those States included in annex II to the Treaty whose signatures are still missing.

We are all confident that the active participation of member States in the work of the CTBTO PrepCom will contribute to the effective implementation of the provisions of the Treaty. Ukraine, in turn, is making every possible effort in this field. In this connection, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Ukraine's seismic station Malyn has been included in the International Monitoring System. This station has been examined by the Provisional Technical Secretariat staff and as a result of the survey an agreement between the PTS and the Ukrainian side related to the modernization of the station has been reached.

My survey of the multilateral arms control treaties would be incomplete without mentioning the importance which Ukraine attaches to the conclusion of the negotiations on the verification protocol to the Convention on the Prohibition of Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons. We are satisfied that this document will include procedures to investigate non-compliance with the provisions of the BTWC. But more emphasis should be given to measures aimed at preventing BTWC violations. We therefore attach great importance to the establishment of control over quantities of microbial or other biological agents and toxins which can provide reliable justification for their use only in protective or other peaceful purposes. The delegation of Ukraine has submitted several proposals in this respect for the attention of the Ad Hoc Group. We encourage other delegations to pay more attention to this problem.

I would now like to dwell upon some other issues of arms control and disarmament which are more or less related to the CD agenda and which, in my opinion, also affect the course of your negotiations.

In formulating its position in the field of strategic arms, Ukraine proceeds from the understanding that participation in all the treaties in the sphere of strategic security concluded by the former USSR and the United States of America meets its national interests. These are the ABM Treaty, the INF Treaty and the START-I Treaty.

The Government of Ukraine attaches the greatest importance to the ABM Treaty and abides by strengthening its viability and effectiveness in the future.

(Mr. Chalyi, Ukraine)

The Ukrainian side proceeds from the position that under present conditions, the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms of 31 July 1991 can be effective and viable only if all the parties strictly comply with the provisions of the ABM Treaty. We call upon both sides to refrain from any unilateral actions which are inconsistent with the provisions of the ABM Treaty or which can negatively affect the viability of START-I or the subsequent fate of START-II.

Ukraine believes that each party to the ABM Treaty has the right to make its own assessment of existing threats to its national territory and to elaborate a programme of actions in order to deter this threat. However, possible actions taken by any party to this Treaty in order to deter the threat of limited missile attack from any State with the potential to launch such an attack should not contradict the Treaty obligations. We believe that consideration of any amendments to the ABM Treaty is impossible until the issue of treaty succession is finally resolved and until the procedural mechanism defined in the new regulations of the Special Consultative Commission is enacted. We can understand the particular domestic political difficulties of the other parties and are prepared to be flexible. At the same time, however, our position remains unchanged - the problem of succession to the ABM Treaty is a top priority today and must be fully resolved in the near future. In this connection, we endorse the recent United States/Russia summit, the results of which we regard as optimistic for reaching important solutions for further progress in nuclear arms reduction and strategic security and stability.

Ukraine is well ahead of the strategic arms elimination schedule provided for in article II of START-I. Overall, 64 per cent of the strategic arms delivery vehicles previously deployed on the territory of Ukraine have now been eliminated. We highly appreciate the aid rendered by the United States to facilitate this process in the framework of the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programme.

However, Ukraine is facing enormous problems in this process, both political and economic. We are considering the possibility of more effective and economic ways of eliminating the strategic weapons which remain deployed on the territory of Ukraine.

It is our expectation that this issue will be resolved, thus enabling further progress in nuclear disarmament.

The Conference on Disarmament, which was conceived to be a unique multilateral disarmament negotiation body, is now going through difficult times. In my view, all delegations, without exception, would lose and nobody would win if the Conference continues to be at an impasse. We should not allow such an unfavourable development. So let me again call on all delegations to show their utmost flexibility during the remainder of this year's session and to ensure the undelayed resumption of negotiations at the next session.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine for his important statement and for the kind words he addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil, Ambassador Celso Amorim.

Mr. AMORIM (Brazil) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, first of all allow me to congratulate you warmly on taking the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament. We are pleased to see the Permanent Representative of Argentina, Brazil's sister nation and partner, on the podium. I am sure that your acknowledged diplomatic abilities and experience will guarantee that you will successfully follow up the praiseworthy efforts of your predecessor, Ambassador Dembri of Algeria. My delegation will provide full support and cooperation to you in discharging your major responsibilities.

(continued in French)

Although you, Mr. President, and the Ambassador of India as the Coordinator of the Group of 21 have already spoken on behalf of all of us, I cannot let the opportunity pass to express my personal sorrow and that of my country at the passing of His Majesty King Hassan II. I had the privilege to be granted a private audience by His Majesty when I was my country's Minister for Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of the Casablanca Conference in 1994. I was personally able to appreciate the extent of his knowledge of and interest in international problems, well beyond his country and his region.

(continued in English)

I have asked for the floor today, on behalf of my delegation and that of the United States of America, to draw the attention of the Conference on Disarmament to the approval on 7 June, at the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, of the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions.

Brazil, together with the United States, was one of the sponsors of this initiative and co-chaired with the United States delegation the Working Group that was established in 1997 and 1998 to discuss and later elaborate a Convention related to transparency and confidence-building measures in the Americas.

Concerted and collective efforts were in fact required to conclude this agreement in such a short period of time. That would not have been possible without a true convergence of interests to contribute to regional transparency and trust, as well as a solid commitment to further consolidate the peaceful security environment prevailing in our hemisphere.

We acknowledge with great satisfaction that the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions has already been signed by the following OAS members: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, United States of America, Uruguay and Venezuela.

(Mr. Amorim, Brazil)

As was the case with the 1997 Convention on Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives, and Other Related Materials, the recently concluded Convention is another pioneering undertaking by the Americas in conventional-arms-related issues.

The Inter-American Convention renders obligatory the annual reporting of information on States parties' imports and exports of conventional weapons covered by the United Nations Arms Register, i.e., battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships and missile and missile launchers.

In addition, the Convention requires that States parties notify acquisitions, either through imports or national production, of conventional weapons in those seven categories, on a case-by-case basis. Notifications shall be submitted to the depositary no later than 90 days after the incorporation of such weapons into the inventory of the armed forces.

The Inter-American Convention indeed reflects a genuine desire in the Americas to strengthen regional peace and security by setting a new transparency norm. It undoubtedly sets an example which will hopefully inspire similar initiatives by other regions of the world, thereby contributing to a more stable international order.

To conclude, Mr. President, I call your attention to a letter dated today which requests that the text of the Inter-American Convention be circulated as an official document of the CD.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of Brazil for his statement and for his words of friendship and support. I take note at the same time of the request for circulation as an official document of the Conference of the text of the Inter-American Convention on Transparency in Conventional Weapons Acquisitions. It shall be done. I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa, Ambassador Sipho George Nene.

Mr. NENE (South Africa): Mr. President, I wish to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of the fullest support and cooperation of the South African delegation. I would also like to express our deep appreciation to your predecessor, Ambassador Dembri of Algeria, who worked with great energy and diligence to advance our work in the CD.

It is regrettable that many months have gone by without the CD being able to adopt a programme of work. It is in part a reflection of certain structural shortcomings of the CD and the manner in which we conduct our work. There is an obvious need for transparency, reform of procedure and further democratization. However, no amount of change will aid progress in the CD if the political will to undertake substantive work and negotiations is not prevalent. External factors have always played a significant role in how the CD reacts to situations that impinge on or alter the international security situation. Events in 1998 marked a major setback and challenge to the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime while other events this year have

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further eroded the international climate. Nevertheless, my delegation remains convinced that the basic elements of our work in the Conference can be positively resolved and that we can start substantive work in the not too distant future.

It is with this in mind that I have requested the floor today to outline some elements South Africa regards as politically achievable and technically feasible in obtaining an effective, credible and workable fissile material treaty that would reinforce the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime. South Africa has, since taking our seat in this Conference, been a strong proponent of the achievement of a fissile material treaty and our preparations for the negotiations are in an advanced stage. Our delegation will introduce a comprehensive working paper once substantive negotiations have started.

In achieving the ideals of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty - namely to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to achieve the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to achieve nuclear disarmament - control over nuclear-weapons materials and the cessation of their production for weapons purposes would be important steps in the complex political and technical process of nuclear disarmament. Nuclear weapons may range in sophistication from fission weapons to boosted weapons, thermonuclear weapons, fission-fusion-fission weapons and enhanced radiation weapons. All require certain specialized materials for their construction. Ceasing the production of such materials could lead to a quantitative capping of the number of weapons in existence and to laying the foundation for their eventual complete elimination.

South Africa has used the following considerations as a starting point in developing some thoughts on the possible scope and requirements of a fissile material treaty (FMT). The FMT would have to be a genuine disarmament measure and not purely address non-proliferation. Along with the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, an FMT would be important in complementing and reinforcing the NPT, which is the principal motivating treaty with respect to the ideal of nuclear disarmament.

For the above reason, the issue of existing stocks would have to be addressed. For practical and political reasons, the declaration of historically produced stocks of weapons materials by all States with nuclear weapons is not believed to be feasible. Materials already declared as excess could however be included as a starting point or "baseline" at entry into force of the FMT for a given State with nuclear weapons.

The continued use of weapons-grade material in naval military reactors will require special consideration. Due to the classified nature of HEU fuel, it will most probably be manufactured from material regarded as being outside the FMT and not from material declared as excess.

A primary focus of the FMT should be to stop the further production of nuclear materials from which nuclear explosives can be made. Using the term "fissile material" in a generic sense for these weapons materials could cause

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misunderstanding - in a technical sense, "fissile material" has different definitions. A common understanding will have to be agreed for the use of the term.

Tritium is not a fissile material and the need for it will, in practice, only disappear to the extent that nuclear disarmament undertakings reach their final objective. However, due to the closure of certain production reactors, the possibility of the production of tritium in commercial civil reactors, for military explosive use, should be avoided.

Viewed from this perspective the FMT could capture in an irreversible way weapons material declared as excess in an ongoing process; prevent altogether or regulate the further production of weapons-grade materials for legitimate uses such as fuel for research reactors, naval reactors, etc.; make "closed-down" production and associated facilities subject to verification to prevent their reuse for weapons purposes.

For the effective verification of the material included within the scope of the FMT a system comprising two components is foreseen: a component suitably adapted to weapons-grade material which has been declared as excess and placed under the supervision of the verification organization while this material is still in a sensitive geometrical and compositional form; and a component, which could be similar to current IAEA safeguards, dealing with the following: materials once they have been reworked into non-sensitive forms; production of materials for non-proscribed military uses allowed by the Treaty; and facilities which had previously produced fissile material for nuclear explosive purposes so as to verify and monitor their "closed-down" status or continued use for peaceful purposes.

If under "stocks" the past production of weapons-grade material is understood, then there are both political and practical reasons why a full or complete declaration of such stocks as a requirement of the FMT could be problematic in the negotiations for the treaty as well as for its subsequent implementation. Of the nuclear-weapon States, the United States has been the most transparent in declaring past production of weapons-grade plutonium. However, in doing so, a problem of great practical significance was also revealed, that is to say, the fact that no account could be given of about 2,800 kg of plutonium - enough to manufacture several hundred nuclear weapons. The practical significance of declaring stocks with such a large discrepancy in completeness is therefore questionable. This is a practical problem which was also experienced in the case of South Africa. During the "completeness investigation" in South Africa by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the existence of a completeness discrepancy could only be accepted on the strength of other supporting data - that is, other than nuclear materials accounting - such as operational records, electricity consumption, reports on chemical losses, etc. Considering that South Africa produced a relatively small quantity of highly enriched uranium over a period of about 15 years, the practical problem of giving an accurate production figure for tens and hundreds of tons of material produced over half a century would present significant practical problems. Declaration of nuclear material in weapons or directly associated with nuclear weapons without the ability to verify the declaration which will be made would therefore not contribute to confidence-building in a meaningful way.

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The FMT could thus address weapons material which has been transferred from military use to peaceful nuclear activities, declared as excess. This excess material would be included in a starting inventory of a State upon entry into force of the FMT and would be subject to the verification machinery provided for in the treaty. Further material declared as excess in the future would continuously be added to the starting inventory in an irreversible way.

Standards for security from theft and sabotage, as well as safety to ensure no harm to health and the environment, would also have to be considered. Increased transparency and declarations of historical production on a voluntary basis would increase confidence and could be seen as a political gesture of goodwill although the practical difficulties regarding completeness will need to be acknowledged.

I hope these initial elements will contribute to the debate on a fissile material treaty and provide delegations with a basis for further consideration of these issues once substantive negotiations commence.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): Many thanks to the representative of South Africa for his important contribution. The representative of Finland, Ambassador Reimaa, now has the floor.

Mr. REIMAA (Finland): Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and wish you best success in your important work. On behalf of the delegation of Finland, I would also like to extend my warmest welcome to all the new colleagues who have started in the CD this summer.

As this last part of the 1999 session of the CD is beginning, let me assure you that we support your efforts to come to an agreement on a programme of work. At the same time, we would like to thank your predecessor, Ambassador Dembri, and all the previous Presidents for their efforts on this difficult issue.

The delegation of Finland regrets that in spite of those serious efforts we are starting the third part of this year's session of the Conference without a programme of work. This situation is a matter of grave concern to us. With this and in view of the earlier expectations that the Conference would get down to practical work, the Conference on Disarmament is facing a critical moment.

Your predecessor, Ambassador Dembri, left on the table a comprehensive proposal on the programme of work, which came very close to a consensus. In our view, in the present situation, a substantive and comprehensive programme of work is the most realistic alternative for an agreement - substantive and comprehensive, because there are more than just one important issue to be discussed or negotiated.

We hope that the outstanding problems involving nuclear disarmament and outer space can soon be solved in order to have an agreement on the programme of work. Since there is not much time left in this session, it would be

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important and perhaps even helpful to reach understanding in principle that the same programme would be followed when the CD starts its next year's session in January 2000.

While underlining the priority of the FMCT negotiations for my country, Finland also sees the value of the other items in the work programme proposal, such as anti-personnel landmines, negative security assurances and the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Nuclear disarmament remains a matter of prime importance to the entire international community and it deserves appropriate attention also at the Conference on Disarmament. To advance consideration under agenda item 1 of the Conference, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway tabled a proposal to set up an ad hoc working group to study ways and means of establishing an exchange of information and views within the Conference on endeavours towards nuclear disarmament. To our delegation, this proposal seems to offer one realistic possibility to move forward, and noting the positive signals given, we would certainly welcome early agreement on this issue.

In this context, I would add that regarding nuclear arms reductions, Finland considers the START process as the most practical way to achieve concrete results - that is, further significant reductions of nuclear arsenals - at this point.

Finland welcomes the intention declared by president Clinton and President Yeltsin in their meeting in Cologne in June 1999 to move towards START III negotiations. The subsequent Joint Statement in Washington by Vice-President Gore and Prime Minister Stepashin two days ago to begin discussions on START III strengthens prospects for the continuation of nuclear disarmament. We hope that these developments will soon lead to the entry into force of the START II Treaty and to the opening of negotiations and conclusion of the START III Treaty, as already outlined at the Helsinki summit in March 1997. We also note with interest the comments made by the United States of America and the Russian Federation in their joint statement of 20 June, and the follow-up by Vice-President Gore and Prime Minister Stepashin, on initiating further discussions on the ABM treaty. We hope that these steps will consolidate the trend of the past decade where confrontation has been replaced by cooperation.

After the agreement by the CD in August 1998, it is evident that the negotiations on an FMCT are the most useful and tangible contribution that the CD can make to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. While recognizing that there are other important issues for the CD to tackle, starting negotiations on an FMCT is a key issue for the work of the Conference.

This is a matter where consensus has clearly been registered. In 1998 the General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously welcomed this decision and encouraged the Conference on Disarmament to re-establish this ad hoc committee at the beginning of the 1999 session. At the last meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the importance of

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such negotiations was highlighted by many. During this year's session of the CD, the consensus on FMCT established last year has not been called into question.

An FMCT would irreversibly limit the fissile material stockpiles available for use for nuclear weapons purposes. Such a treaty, capping fissile material production and containing an effective international verification system, would further strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and would contribute to the efforts to further reduce nuclear arsenals. We should grasp the opportunity that we have in front of us and commence swiftly negotiations on such a treaty.

Before I conclude, let me touch upon the issue of CD expansion. We hope that the Conference will finally take a positive decision on the proposal made last year by the Special Coordinator, Ambassador Hofer of Switzerland, to expand the CD by five countries - Ecuador, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Malaysia and Tunisia. We would see this as one more important step in the continuing process of CD expansion.

Mr. TANTOH (Cameroon): Mr. President, my delegation wishes to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the CD and wishes furthermore to assure you of our constant support throughout your tenure of office. This delegation also joins the groups which have spoken before it to express its sympathy to the Moroccan people at the death of His Majesty King Hassan II.

My delegation has asked for the floor this morning to inform this assembly that Cameroon's National Assembly deliberated on and the President of the Republic signed into law two weeks ago the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines. The instruments of Cameroon's ratification of this Convention will be deposited at the appropriate quarters in the coming weeks.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Cameroon for his statement. We take note of the information which you have been kind enough to share with us today.

We have started the third and last part of our annual session. During the inter-sessional period I made contact with a number of delegations and groups of delegations, bilaterally and multilaterally, with a view to reaching agreement on the programme of work of the Conference on Disarmament. I intend to continue all types of consultations during the whole of the coming week, and I sincerely trust that I will be able to get a clearer idea of the situation in which we find ourselves, and also to see, together, where we are going and how we can achieve the common objective which I am sure is shared by all the members of the Conference.

That concludes our work for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 5 August 1999, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.